



Five Big Ideas In Reading Instruction

In 1997, Congress asked the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development and the US Department of Education to form a panel of experts to review the research on teaching reading. In 2000, the panel, known as the National Reading Panel (NRP) issued their findings in the report “Teaching Children to Read”. The panel published a list of five essential components of reading instruction. These components are now known as the “Five Big Ideas in Reading Instruction.”

Phonemic Awareness

Phonemic awareness is the ability to hear and manipulate the individual sounds in words. Before children can effectively learn to read print, they need to understand that words are made up of speech sounds, or phonemes, and that can be broken apart and put back together to form words. Research indicates that phonemic awareness is one of the best predictors of a child’s ability to read in the first few years of school. Children who cannot perceive the separate sounds within words have difficulty when it is time to match sounds with letters when learning to read.

Phonics

Phonics instruction involves teaching students how the written letters correspond to the sounds of speech and how to use this knowledge in reading and spelling. This includes teaching the letter sounds, how complex spelling patterns are pronounced, and how to use this information to sound out words. The NRP concluded that kindergarten and first grade children who receive systematic phonics instruction are better at reading and spelling than children who do not receive systematic instruction. Systematic instruction is the direct teaching letter-sound relationships in a logical sequence.

Fluency

Fluency is the ability to read text aloud with accuracy, speed, and proper expression. When students struggle with the mechanics of reading there is no mental energy left to devote to understanding what they are reading. Oral reading fluency is important because there is a strong correlation between a student’s ability to read grade level text orally and the ability to comprehend text.

Vocabulary

Vocabulary refers to word meanings. Oral vocabulary refers to the words used when speaking while reading vocabulary refers to the words recognized in print. The NRP found that both implicit and explicit approaches to teaching vocabulary were effective across the grades. Explicit instruction includes teaching students the meanings of words, techniques to determine word meanings from context, and the meanings of roots and affixes. The Panel concluded that vocabulary instruction resulted in improved reading achievement as measured by reading comprehension tests.

Comprehension

Reading comprehension refers to the act of understanding and interpreting information from text. It is the reason for reading. Comprehension strategies are intentional actions that a reader can take to increase the chances of understanding or remembering the information that is read. Teaching students specific strategies to improve comprehension has been supported by research. The NRP conclude that there are 7 strategies with sufficient evidence supporting their use in reading instruction: asking questions, monitoring, summarization, question answering, story mapping, graphic organizers, and cooperative grouping.

